Colour in the Hardy Border
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Colour in the Hardy Border

BLUE AND PURPLE

SOUTH MANCHESTER.

A fortnight ago these notes were concerned with the hardy flower border and the preparation of it. After the soil has been well dug it should lie idle for a few weeks to settle, and during that time thought can be given to the kind and number of plants needed and positions chosen that will suit the requirements of, first, the more difficult plants; after which the less exacting ones can be arranged in harmony with them.

Some years ago there was a reaction against the mixed border where flowers of all colours and shades were grown indiscriminately and a fashion set in for borders of one colour only—blue, pink, yellow, and so on,—or, what was much more attractive, borders limited to three or four colours, such as blue, lilac, and pink intermingled with grey foliage, or yellow and bronze with green foliage.

In spacious grounds there is much to be said in favour of these colour schemes One can be cheered by the orange garden on a dull morning and be grateful for the cool grey-blue border on a sweltering afternoon. But in the small garden such colour arrangements, unless very skilfully carried out, have a self-conscious air which detracts from, rather than adds to, enjoyment, and planting for general colour effect will be found more agreeable as a rule.

One advantage of a general colour effect over a particular colour scheme in the small garden is that it is always changing with the seasons, and the tiresome monotony of seeing one place always devoted to the same colours is avoided. The charm of seasonal variation is better appreciated in a general border. And there is not nearly so much need to fear a clashing of hues as one might think. Varying colours that may appear incongruous in dress or furniture or indoor decoration generally are toned and blended and knit together by the subtle harmonies of their leafy framework, if sufficient care be taken to avoid too glaring contrasts and if plants which bloom at the same time and have colours which do not harmonise—the scarlet Oriental poppy and the old crimson peony, for example—are grown sufficiently wide apart, or separated by shrubs or thick foliage, so that the eye does not see both together.

Planning the Border

At the same time, in the planning of a border it is desirable to look as far ahead and as wide afield as one can, rather than to buy and arrange plants haphazardly; and, as it is also desirable to avoid spotty effects, a good plan for a beginner would be to draw up a list, or lists, of plants according to the colours of their flowers, so that several different varieties may be arranged together and, if possible, in such a way that, as in the rainbow, for example, they blend as naturally as may be. I start with the blue because, although most people have their favourite colour or colours, all will agree that it is one of the most beautiful; and purples are added because there are comparatively few flowers which, like the gentian and the anchusa, can be described as really blue.

Among the blue and purple flowers for wide borders the stately delphinium takes pride of place. If treated generously and given a well-drained soil it will grow well in country or town and in sun or shade, though it will throw finer flower-spikes where it enjoys a fair amount of sunshine. As many varieties will grow 6ft. high, they should be planted 18in. apart towards the back of the border. The light and medium tones show up well against a background of greenery, but the deep purples need the neighbourhood of pale tones as a foil to their dark hues. In late years the newer large-flowered doubles have been more or less tinged with mauve or lilac shades, but growers are now striving to produce a flower which combines the substance of the modern strain with the blue of the old race. Of these, Mrs. Paul Nelke is the best so far. Where colour is the chief consideration Blue Bird, Blue Boy, and Pannonia also are very desirable. Good pale blues include Mrs. Townley Parker, Cambria, Star of Langport, Queen Mary, Millicent Blackmore, and Nora Ferguson, the two last being more mauve-tinted than the others. There are so many fine, dark delphiniums that choice is difficult, but those with room to spare will not regret growing Sir Douglas Haig, The Alake, Rev. E Lascelles, The Bishop, Monarch of Wales, Smoke of War, Violet Queen, and J. W Kelway.

The flowers of Anchusa italica, though small, are such a pure and charming blue that one hesitates to decry it. On some soils it is free-blooming and an acquisition, but on others its coarse leafage makes it only fit for the wild garden. Where it does well, the varieties Morning Glory and Lissadell can be recommended for deepness of colour, and Opal and Pride of Dover as good, but slightly paler, shades. They grow about 5ft. high, prefer a sunny position, and, like so many blue flowers, are beloved of bees.

Phlox

Herbaceous phloxes make so magnificent a display when really well grown that it is worth while to allow ample room for some of the many varieties if the soil be of a deep, rich loam. On a poor soil it will be difficult to grow them at all unless the ground be thoroughly enriched with old cow manure at the time of planting, and also annually mulched in spring with equal parts of manure and decayed leaves. To ensure fine trusses of bloom, only five or six of the strongest shoots should be allowed on each stool, the others being cut out when two or three inches high. They, too, should be planted 18in. apart, and in partial shade. Slugs often kill phloxes by eating the newly sprouted shoots early in the season. To prevent this the earth should be drawn away from the crowns in late autumn and coarse sand or coal ashes heaped over and around them—a precaution which should also be applied to the delphinium.

There are some attractive plants among the sage family, but the most charming of them, Salvia patens, is unfortunately not quite hardy. Its tuberous roots must be wintered in a frost-proof shed or cellar. This care will be amply repaid by a profusion of quaintly lipped flowers of an intense blue. As its height is only 18in., its place is at the front of the border. Salvia virgata nemorosa, which is quite hardy, has not the charm of patens, but is a colourful plant when grown in good masses, as after the blue blossoms have faded the violet-hued bracts still make a striking effect It is from 2ft. to 3ft. high and blooms from July to September. Salvia uliginosa, a little taller, bears showy spikes of azure from July to October.

The polemoniums (Jacob's Ladder) are neat plants with pretty pinnate leaves, suitable for the front of a sunny well-drained border The variety Richardsoni bears soft sky blue, phlox-like flowers and blooms, and increases freely if pulled to pieces and transplanted every two or three years The globethistle (Echinops) and sea-holly (Eryngium), although belonging to different orders, are often mistaken for one another owing to resemblances in their thistle-like flower-heads and spiny foliage. Echinops Ritro, about 4ft. high, has flower-heads of glistening blue from July to September The eryngiums, being not so tall, only 2ft to 3ft. need a more forward position in a sunny border, where their handsome leaves and metallic-blue bracts and stems are very effective

Some of the veronicas make masses of vivid colour when placed near the front of a sunny border. Veronica longifolia sub-sessilis, violet blue, about 1½ft. high, blooms from July to September; and V. spicata royal blue and V true blue, both about 15in. in height, should also be given good positions And besides these there are, of course, the smoky-blue campanulas and lupins, the newer hybrids of the Scabiosa caucasica, and violas of many kinds for the edging.

B. L.

WOOD ASHES.—A Widnes correspondent asks whether I think "the average gardener can go out and burn down a forest every time he wants a bit of potash." I admit it would be difficult in the confines of Widnes. But even in the neighbourhood of Widnes there are doubtless hedgerows which need periodical clipping and a fair amount of other garden and household rubbish which it would be better to burn and return to the soil than to wheel away to some waste land as so many people do Wood ashes are unquestionably valuable for the potash they contain—about half as much as in Kainit—and also because they have the property of absorbing ammonia. Muriate of potash, if not carefully used, may do more damage than good Besides which, it is expensive, which hedge clippings are not. Sulphate of potash is safer —B. L.